

California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley

Land Use, Agriculture and Housing

The Issue

All population predictions identify the Central Valley, especially the San Joaquin Valley as the receiving area for much of California's growth in the coming decades. With current population at 3.2 million, even conservative estimates suggest the population will swell to almost 8 million in the next forty years. At the same time Californians value agricultural land as a resource and often express concern about the unnecessary and/or premature urbanization of this important resource.

The eight county region is large—more than 25,000 square miles, and could successfully accommodate the projected growth and economic diversification, ensure a successful agricultural industry and the conservation of important natural resources.

The challenge is to make sure that the growth creates healthy, sustainable cities, that provide a wide range of employment opportunities and the suite of amenities that are expected by Californians:

- Parks, schools, healthy downtowns, commercial and cultural facilities and safe neighborhoods;
- A range of housing types and jobs to accommodate the diversity of the region's growing population,
- Transportation to allow for personal mobility and the movement of goods and services,
- Land and resources to support a diversified economy, and
- A healthy environment with clean air and clean water.

The Opportunity

Learning from the past

Learning from history and the experiences of other large urbanized areas—Los Angeles and San Jose—there is great opportunity to create a new model for the region that will accommodate growth and ensure the vitality of the San Joaquin Valley's multi-billion dollar agricultural industry. There is a heightened awareness of the needs of agriculture, both from a land and resource point-of-view, and of its value as an employer that creates thousands of jobs in direct and indirect ag-related industries.

Using new tools

There are new tools that can be used to model and predict the impacts of growth based on policy priorities, urban densities, and natural resources, giving policy makers, land owners and planners enormous amounts of information to pro-actively decide where and how development should occur so as to have the least impact on resources.

Success in multi county planning

There are several examples of large scale planning that has been successfully used to both accommodate growth and conserve important resources. In Orange, San Diego and Riverside Counties, the Natural Communities Conservation Program identified important resources, areas for developers and transportation, and appropriate mitigation measures that could be used throughout the huge and rapidly growing region, allowing greater certainty for development, landowners and conservationists in the area. Within the past few years, the six county Sacramento Metropolitan Region undertook a massive community engagement and planning effort, called the Blueprint Project, to evaluate current patterns of development and change existing patterns in order to preserve the urban core, minimize the impacts of “sprawl” in the area, and ensure that the transportation systems that were being planned and built would match the needs of the urbanizing areas.

Challenges

Lack of coordination and competition hamper positive outcomes

While California has historically required cities and counties to have General Plans that allow for growth, for a variety of reasons, the Plans, especially in the San Joaquin Valley are inadequate to the task of preparing the region for the massive amount of growth and change that is to come. City and county plans are not necessarily coordinated. Current law allows school districts to purchase land for new schools without consulting city or county general plans, and so school sites often become the predictor of new development. Once a site is chosen, the area around it becomes a target for land speculation and development as the school itself becomes the magnet for urban uses, without regard to the local agency plans. Local agencies often compete for tax producing land uses like shopping centers and auto malls. There are eight independent Councils of Government (COGs), that coordinate to the extent possible, but report to independent Boards and often demonstrate different priorities, making the development of a comprehensive well planned regional transportation system difficult, if not impossible. The availability and use of geographic information systems and computer models is uneven across the region, and no one organization or agency has or “serves” that data to local agencies and the public.

Looking for certainty

There are enormous investments being made in land in the region, and while developers and investors see opportunity in growth, there is uncertainty about the direction and the “rules” that will guide the development of the region. The cost of premature investment is huge, and can be demonstrated by land purchases and holdings proposed for development that remained outside the areas zoned for development after even fifteen or twenty years. There is even a story of one grower who has been holding his land waiting for development for more than forty years! This kind of speculation raises land prices and increases the pressure for premature urbanization. The use of development fees for new construction is inconsistent between jurisdictions, setting up a competitive environment in which local revenue potential is lost and infrastructure needs cannot be supported. Developers want predictable and consistent fees and cannot work in a volatile environment. There is no agreement on public service requirements for cities, and there

is no consensus around the use of mitigation fees for farmland loss. There is no capacity to assess or predict the cumulative impacts of growth to the region over time.

Window of Opportunity

There is a growing consensus that the San Joaquin Valley needs a strategic plan—that can provide the umbrella for cities’ and counties’ local planning efforts, that will increase the coordination and collaboration between government agencies, and the private sector, and that will increase the likelihood that the region will prosper with growth and change, not simply increase congestion, pollution and a diminished quality of life.

There is a great deal of expressed readiness within and without the region. The San Joaquin Valley Supervisors Association will begin a conversation about the principles for growth in the region that could be considered and adopted by all member counties. The Board of the Council of Government have listed as their highest priority “regional planning for growth”. Some counties have already begun collaborative conversations around county wide planning. Large developers in the region have expressed interest in having greater clarity about where and when development can occur, and resource and transportation agencies have begun to create their own strategies within a context of an eight county region.

The Great Valley Center has created a group of scenarios for the future that has been widely publicized in the region, as a way of starting a conversation about making choices for the future. The Public Policy Institute of California created a model for different growth scenarios in the San Joaquin Valley based on transportation routes that can be amended and configured to fit a variety of situations. The California Resources Agency has an extensive data base resource, including soil types, land uses and relevant data that could be employed to inform and guide a region wide look at alternatives for the future. The American Farmland Trust has extensive data on urbanization patterns, and the Urban Land Institute has published a set of Smart Growth Guidelines. An enormous amount of background work and study has been done; *the opportunity before the Partnership is to take those resources and use them constructively to support a new, successful model for the future of the San Joaquin Valley.*

Specific tasks:

Develop a macro level concept plan for the San Joaquin Valley

Working with the Great Valley Center, the Partnership should bring together stakeholders and the efforts and resources that already exist, and develop a strategy for integrating the related parts of a complex system into a cohesive, and strategic model for the region that will provide housing, community amenities and mobility for a growing population, attract and support a diversified economy, ensure the viability of the agricultural base, protect important natural resources and ensure a clean and healthy environment.

Develop a series of incentives for landowners, developers and local governments who coordinate their actions on a regional basis. The work that has been done for Infrastructure investment, transportation dollars, and other State funding sources provides

the basis for prioritizing funding requests based on the applicants adherence to regional guidelines and principles.

Identify legislative and regulatory issues, which if changed or amended could lead to better, more consistent and predictable outcomes for communities, landowners and investors,

Working with local governments and other interested stakeholders, considering the work of the CEQA working group, and reviewing the existing studies and publications, the Partnership should identify the issues and then prioritize the list into a manageable number of high priority items for short-term action.

Consider reorganization or consolidation strategies that would aid the San Joaquin Valley in greater cohesion and collaboration for large scale, regional, issues.

The Partnership should consider and recommend financial and regulatory incentives for consolidation and restructuring to improve efficiency and reduce the costs and improve certainty for those who can provide economic activity and job growth.

Provide the mechanism for greater availability and use of spatial data by State and local agencies, stakeholders and the public.

Through State commissions and agencies, under the leadership of the ICE Center at UC Davis, and the Great Places Program at the Resources Agency, provide executive actions to ensure the availability and integration of data that will facilitate a comprehensive look at the land values and opportunities of the region, including at least existing city and county boundaries and spheres of influence including infill opportunities, proposed new towns, important natural resource areas, prime soils and soils of statewide significance, permanently protected lands, state and national wildlife refuges, flood plains, endangered species habitat, transportation corridors and planned corridors (e.g. HSR), etc.

Ensure the coordination of regional and State agencies to provide the greatest level of efficiency and accomplishment.

The Governor's Cabinet Secretaries appointed to the Partnership can provide the necessary leadership and coordination to maximize efficiency and reduce redundancy in the effort.

Proposed Strategies:

Coordinated by the Great Valley Center and supported by interested groups and organizations (the California Resources Agency, the eight Councils of Government in the San Joaquin Valley, the California Planning Roundtable, the American Farmland Trust, the ICE Center at UC Davis, the Urban Land Institute and others), a process should be undertaken to create a concept strategy for the region that will identify land use conservation and development issues, find realistic ways to provide housing for all income levels, facilitate economic development, and provide the land resources to support a vibrant, and healthy agricultural sector and a clean environment.

- GVC will convene a series of workshops with interest groups, state agencies, private investors, local governments, and others to review existing work and develop a plan

for integration of local priorities, housing goals, land and natural resources GIS data for the region, existing local general plans, and the host of other required data and information. The effort will result in recommendations for the Partnership Board's consideration by August of 2006.

NOTE: It is not intended that this process will create a regional plan, but it will create recommendations for principles and for the necessary next steps to ensure a coordinated strategy for the region that deals with projected growth, economic development and the environment.

- The California Resources Agency will provide an overview of legislative and regulatory issues to be changed or amended in order to accomplish the broader goals of the California Partnership by the first quarter of 2006.
- ICE at UC Davis and its partners will design a data base for CEQA documents to monitor and assess cumulative impacts of land use changes and development over time by December of 2006.

The list of publications is long—and will be provided when complete. There are more than 56 publications by PPIC alone that relate to the San Joaquin Valley CEQA reform and resources.